

GROWING AS A POET, GROWING AS A COUNSELLOR

by

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## ABSTRACT

Research on the professional growth and the reflective processes of beginning counsellors is minimal. My study explores the growth I experienced as I developed as a counsellor. To carry out my study I used autoethnographic vignettes which demonstrate how reflecting on my growth as a poet helped gauge and guide my professional growth as a beginning counsellor. The elements of growth I identified are: character, culture and approach; relationship; rhythm; pattern of my process; purpose; curiosity; judgement, assessment, and letting go; confidence and feedback; saying less, showing more; hanging on to fleeting feelings and thoughts; vastness and solitude; the whole experience; passion, vocation, and God. I conclude that reflecting on other life-roles, such as that of a poet, can provide constructive insight for the professional growth of beginning counsellors.

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## Chapter One

### *Introduction*

As a beginning counsellor, I wanted to know if I was growing in the right areas at the right pace. I felt a shift at one point during training, where I moved from having a safe presence with an individual, to connecting on a deeper level where I felt confident entering the dialogue as well as reflecting the dialogue. It was this point in my development that I saw a connection between my growth as a poet and my growth as a counsellor. For example, in both counselling and poetry presence is both necessary and undeniable, as is safety; dialogue can hinge or unhinge on confidence; and reflection dictates the depth of connection, all of which underpin relationship. In both roles, I was learning communication, compassion, and competence.

Aware of this connection I was able to see that the process I go through growing as a poet empowers me, and it is this empowerment I turn to, and rely heavily on to guide my growth as a counsellor. Reflecting on my growth as a poet is the most reasonable way for me to gauge and guide my growth as a counsellor for the following reasons. First, as a counsellor, I know it is invaluable to tap into an individual's existing resources to attain and maintain support and guidance. I do this when I reflect on my growth as a poet, and seek to transfer found meaning and elements of growth to my growth as a counsellor. Second, it seems essential to acknowledge the many different aspects of Self, which constitute one's very "be-ing." Third, I am aware of growing as a counsellor due to

elements of growth I identified as a poet which I then translated into elements of counselling that appeared to me as opportunities for growth. For example, assessing my development as a counsellor, I knew that I desired to develop my sense of curiosity towards clients. To do this, I searched for a time when I had done something similar before. What I discovered, was the way I cultivated curiosity as a poet, in order to develop a richer relationship within a poem, and within a character. This insight was the beginning of my developing ability to deepen relationships as a counsellor.

Poetry is a source of pride to me. I gain a sense of accomplishment from working really hard at producing a professional piece of work. I am also constantly working towards this feeling as a beginning counsellor. Sometimes I feel I am just beyond that “beginning” sense as a counsellor, but my comfort level is just not quite there— it comes and goes. I have felt this way while developing as a poet.

When it comes to writing poetry, I have an undying belief that I am a poet, and that I am progressing towards recognized professionalism. Recognized, for me, means that my peers and mentors will appreciate my work, that it holds promise within the larger poetic community. I turn to this intrinsic knowing when I want to feel progressive and competent as a growing counsellor. My belief that I have grown progressively and successfully as a poet, has been cultivated over a period of 11 years, during which time I have worked constructively and critically with peers, teachers, and mentors. As counsellor, I still need to reach a professional level. I know I will reach this level, and feel confident identifying my growth as a counsellor, by reflecting on my growth as a poet.

Reflection, and reflective practice, is an accepted and integrated part of education programs and counsellor training. Surprisingly, although reflection is relied upon quite

heavily in graduate counselling courses, I was surprised to find it is rarely developed in counselling textbooks and handbooks. In fact, reflection as a topic is often missing from textbooks and handbooks. In the literature, reflection is usually presented as a type of journaling activity. Peer, and supervisor feedback are also mentioned, as is developing a relationship with a mentor (Stickel & Trimmer, 1994), or in some situations, creating a portfolio (Lasley & Tillman, 1994). These are all useful, and used, ways of reflecting.

In reflective teaching literature, reflection is a way of problem solving (Schon, 1987; Norlander-Case, Reagan, & Case, 1999). I began this project looking for literature that either focused totally on, or contained evidence of a link between counselling and poetry. What I found was that creative expression in general was modest in its relationship with the counselling literature, and when specifically involved, was used as an intervention. I also realized that I desired to find information on the growth of beginning counsellors. I searched handbooks and textbooks on counselling. What I found was that the experience, and lived experience, of developing as a counsellor was missing. I noticed that assessment and evaluation information usually appeared at the end of the texts— and did not always offer perspective on how a student might assess oneself, or evaluate one's own progressive growth as a counsellor.

In the counselling literature, Kiser (2000) states "Much has been written about how students can best learn from experience" (p. 57). She proposes the use of the "Integrative Processing Model" which involves 6 components that together:

Serve as a tool to help you reflect upon and think through your field experiences carefully and systematically, integrating major components from your education, including knowledge of theory and content, self-awareness, and professional

ethics. Your knowledge, behavior, attitudes, emotions, and values will all come into play as you process your experiences using this model. (p. 58)

Kiser notes that practicing this model will internalize this way of reflection, and be available for ongoing learning as a student and as a professional. As a student who used this model, it worked because it was used ongoing throughout my practicum, or field, experience. However, it worked best when I did not limit myself to focusing only on practicum or field experiences. I suggest extending this model to include knowledge of growth in other life-roles. Instead of gathering data only from field experience, students could use data gathered from concurrent life-roles. What I am looking for is a way of reflecting that doesn't arise from a need to solve a problem, or as a means of recording my experience, but from a curiosity to develop as a counsellor. Moreover, I want to draw on my growth as a poet. Essentially what I am proposing is for beginning counsellors to reflect on experiences outside of such regular counselling experiences as classroom activities, assignments, field and practicum placements, in order to identify elements of growth they have already experienced in that role (not necessarily that of a poet), which they can apply to their growth as a counsellor.

Counsellor development has been viewed from a supervisor perspective, as student counsellors, and counsellors in training are more easily accessible (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). There are some verbatim accounts of practicum student experience presented in the literature; but there is a lack of published voices from beginning counsellors, and school counsellors (Stickel & Trimmer, 1994). There is a need, and an interest in hearing the experiences of beginning counsellors. A shift is taking place, presenting opportunities for student counselling experience to be shared "as is" and presented in student

text and handbooks for the benefit of student counsellors, instead of translating a beginning counsellor's experience into elements for a supervisor to watch out for. Such reflection could contribute to the greater enhancement of a beginning counsellor's growth.

Narrative inquiry has become common in education research, with an obvious interest in expressing learning through lived data. The presence of voice has become increasingly important in educational research. Eisner (1991) says in *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*:

A word about voice. I have tried in this book, as in all of my writing, to keep a sense of voice present. I want readers to know that this author is a human being and not some disembodied abstraction who is depersonalized through linguistic conventions that hide his signature. (pp. 3-4)

In the social science disciplines, there is a growing need to express professional awareness through personal learning, and a desire to share learning via specific, concrete lived experience. In addition, the boundaries between the social sciences are becoming blurred, enabling researchers and readers to move back and forth between academic disciplines (Ellis & Bochner, 1996).

Poetry, a literary craft, is viewed primarily as a cathartic experience or intervention strategy, not as a means of professional reflection for a beginning counsellor. Specifically, reflecting on the process of growing as a poet has not been explored in the literature as a way of reflecting on professional growth as a beginning counsellor.

I am hoping to contribute an alternate form of reflecting on the professional growth of a beginning counsellor. My narrative will transcend the required meeting of a skills set, as traditionally used to measure professional growth as a counsellor. I will draw upon my

experience as a beginning counsellor, and my experience of creating additional ways of reflecting on my growth as a counsellor. This alternative form of reflection developed out of a need to identify my growth as a counsellor, to supplement measurement and feedback acquired in traditional ways, such as practicum seminars, peer consultation, assignments, supervisor and teacher feedback.

“How does a poet grow?” This question, from Kroetsch’s (1981) poem *Seed Catalogue*, triggered my awareness that reflecting on my growth as a poet aided my growth as a counsellor. Moreover, reflecting on my growth serves as a model of reflection for other beginning counsellors wishing to track and promote their growth as a counsellor.

### *Problem*

Reflection is used by beginning counsellors as a means of understanding their experience and feelings during their time of training. Current modes of reflecting include journaling, external feedback, and learning portfolios. With this study I hope to offer an additional way of reflecting on the growth of a beginning counsellor. Historically, the focus of reflection is usually on the meeting of specific counselling skills, and from the perspective of a supervisor, such as Stoltenberg and Delworth’s (1987) model of development. If a beginning counsellor can identify areas of growth in other progressive areas of their life, including, but not limited to that of a poet, and a conscious effort is made to identify these elements of growth, then a conscious effort to seek out similar concepts and elements of growth as a counsellor can be made. Thus, the beginning counsellor will be

provided with guidance and feedback on their progressive growth as a counsellor.

Growth is intrinsic for all counsellors, but is probably more sought out by beginning counsellors. Growing as a counsellor does not exist in the isolation of a classroom, and learning will take place beyond the context of counselling— in part time jobs, in relationships, in family situations, and even in actively pursued hobbies. Drawing on existing resources and using understood and identified elements of growth as a metaphor to identify and promote growth as a counsellor is palpable. Consider the underpinnings, and ultimate goal of counselling to draw out an individual's personal, inner resources; and the beginning counsellor's experiences as both client and counsellor in required counselling practice both real and role play.

Reflection is used in course work, but is minimally addressed and rarely explored in depth in textbooks and handbooks. According to Stickel and Waltman (1994) "there are no definitive models of how the reflective process can be operationalized in a training program" (p. 4), and "by using their own versions of reflection, beginning counselors can experience their initial struggles as a positive step on the road of professional growth" (p. 8). Reflections on growing as a counsellor are few in the literature; and the voices of beginning counsellors are needed (Stickel & Trimmer, 1994).

Did my experience reflecting on my growth as a poet aid my growth as a counsellor? By sharing examples of when I identified elements of growth as a poet, and by applying this awareness to my growth as a counsellor, I am combining educational research with constructivist theory. This is a framework for reflection which may benefit other beginning counsellors as they develop. I hope to unveil a new resource embedded in poetry, and outline a shift transcending poetry's current use as a therapeutic intervention with



clients, to a practical option for reflecting on professional growth by beginning counsellors.

Limitations of this study may include a reader's unfamiliarity or disinterest with poetry, or that not all counsellors consider themselves poets. This may be overcome by extracting the identified elements of growth from the poet's experience, and relating them back to specific experiences of growth in other life-roles, and then to counselling. Other limitations may involve a reader's individual definition of a beginning counsellor, or their own expectations of development and growth.

A delimitation is that this study focuses on experiences of growth specifically connected with reflections on growing as a poet. Other experiences which contributed to my growth as a counsellor, such as part time work, external feedback, family and relational experiences, researched resources— some of which explored greater feelings of fear and nervousness— will not be discussed in this study. Growth was triggered by many experiences and life events, but I focus on my role as a poet, as it by far was the most frequent role from which I drew familiar growth experiences. Also, the growth experiences shared occurred during the two year period spanning the length of graduate studies attended full time in the Education Counselling program at the University of Northern British Columbia.

### *Literature Review*

There are two major disciplines involved in this proposed study: poetry and counselling. A literature review revealed a surprisingly small amount of research on



reflection in general, in both of these disciplines. In searching for a theoretical framework for this study, my choice was either writing handbooks which offered sets of skills or *Letters to a Young Poet*, by Rilke (1903), which offered experience, but not specific elements of growth as a poet. The growth of counsellors is addressed by Stoltenberg and Delworth's (1987) model found in *Supervising Counselors and Therapists*. Here, the growth of counsellors is presented as an assessment model for clinical supervision. The model consists of three basic structures: self- and other- awareness, motivation, and autonomy, all of which students proceed through in an orderly fashion. In each structure a growth direction occurs in one of the following domains: intervention skills competence, assessment techniques, interpersonal assessment, client conceptualization, individual differences, theoretical orientation, treatment goals and plans, and professional ethics. Descriptions of the levels, and discussions about students, offer a developmental "checklist" of sorts.

Reflection, and reflective teaching, is looked upon as a way to foster and nurture professional growth (Norlander-Case, Reagan, & Case, 1999) and as a way of problem solving (Schon, 1987; Norlander-Case et al., 1999). Reflection has been recognized and utilized in many different disciplines. Reflection is actively used and appreciated in nursing education (Duffy, 2000). Literature specific to reflection in counselling is scarce. Stickel and Trimmer (1994), express a concern that the voices of beginning school counsellors are missing from the literature. Counselling and poetry appear together only when poetry is used as a therapeutic intervention. Growth as a poet used as a means of reflecting on growth as a counsellor is absent from the literature. Literature on professional development focuses on portfolios, journals, mentors, feedback, conferences, workshops, and group seminars. Professional development research has not focused on implementing the use of reflecting on

growth in other life-roles, such as a poet.

### *Methodology*

This is a qualitative study using autoethnography, a form of narrative inquiry (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I chose autoethnography because it allows my voice and utilizes the culture of poetry that I am familiar with; and reveals social processes relevant to counselling within my growth experiences that I use to gauge and promote my professional development as a beginning counsellor. My experience of growing as a poet is presented in thirteen vignettes, each an autoethnographic story portraying, but not limited to, an element of growth that I have identified in each heading. The growth experiences are presented in my voice, and are depicted through dialogue, scenes, and revelations. Some were written as they occurred, and some reconstructed using an initial outline, carefully compiling the details and feelings from each experience. All the vignettes include my interpretation of the growth experience, and how it gauged or promoted my growth as a counsellor.

The autoethnographic process involved a preliminary outline of self-observed growth as a poet, using journal entries, notes, reflective observations of progress based on decisions while writing poetry over the last two years, and a reflection on the changes observed in finished poems. From this outline specific examples of growth are identified and chosen, like development of curiosity, judgement, saying less and showing more. These elements of growth are not named after specific skills, but instead after qualities that I recognized within an experience, which relate to both poetry and counselling.

In addition to the primary data revealed within the text of the autoethnographic vignettes, of which the research is the text (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), a discussion follows. The discussion focuses on recurring themes which run thread-like through the thirteen vignettes, outlining larger elements of growth experienced while growing as a poet, and a counsellor.

Finally, a conclusion offers a brief overview of my growth as a beginning counsellor, highlighting the areas of growth I found most significant; and how reflecting on the growth of one life-role influenced growth in another life-role. I have outlined a way of reflecting on professional growth for beginning counsellors, which also demonstrates one way which the voices of beginning counsellors can be added to the existing literature.

## Chapter Two

### *Autoethnographic Stories Connecting Growth as a Poet with Growth as a Counsellor*

#### *Character, Culture and Approach*

I have been in Kirkby Moorside for a week, surprised to be sitting outside in shorts that I'd packed hesitantly, but with optimism. It is mid June, and my father is at the top of the steps, level with the red-tiled roof, weeding the overgrown yard of the cottage. It is a row-cottage that has been in our family for over a hundred years, in the small village of Kirkby Moorside, Yorkshire, England. Our row leads to the edge of the moors, to the footpath blocked off due to foot and mouth disease. I sit directly outside the kitchen reading Seamus Heaney's (1999) translation of *Beowulf*. We'd just stepped in from a short bus trip into Helmsley for the market: my father with garden mushrooms and pork pies, and me with my new copy of *Beowulf*. I read the introduction in the late afternoon sun. I re-read the introduction in the evening, upstairs in the attic, surrounded by old framed pictures of my long deceased family. Among the old pictures is a copy of the booklet commemorating my convocation from my undergraduate degree in Child and Youth Care. In this place of familiarity I read, and re-read, the introduction to *Beowulf*.

I go back to the introduction again and again, feeling closer to the planks on the attic floor, and the earth coming through the kitchen floor. I dig deeper into the words I read, eager to feel the connection with my history. Heaney (1999) explains:

But there is another outer rim of value, a circumference of understanding within which the heroic world is occasionally viewed as from a distance and recognized for what it is, an earlier state of consciousness and culture, one that has not been altogether shed but that has now been comprehended as part of another pattern. (p. xvi)

I feel relieved to find my thoughts in another man's words. Relieved to read "poets' biographies are present in the sounds they make" (Heaney, p. xxiii). I see my poems differently for a moment, see them humanistically, see more than the craft.

I find myself silently confirming where I come from. I can not separate my poet self from my counsellor self. I think of clients as heroes, and how I have joined people in counselling relationships where both our accumulated foundations are only glimpsed by each other. There is so much inside a person. There are so many deep roots that are guiding lives, yet they are not identified. What kind of consciousness exists? What happens when two bodies sit side by side with so many roots? Do their minds detect this? Are they supposed to detect this? Do they act unconsciously from their culture, or act out of a need to detect the culture deep within them? I go back to the paragraphs speaking of a particular word Seamus Heaney's aunt spoke, and how thrilled he was to find this word in other language dictionaries, and in a modern poem. The word became more than a family word, it became a part of a larger history, connecting cultures, as Heaney (1999) describes:

Meeting up with *thole* on its multi-cultural odyssey was the feeling that Osip Mandelstam once defined as 'nostalgia for world culture'. And this was a nostalgia I didn't even know I suffered until I experienced its fulfilment in this little epiphany. It was as if, on the analogy of baptism by desire, I had undergone something like

illumination by philology. (pp. xxv-xxvi)

Heaney's experience confirmed his discourse; and by reading it, I brought the whole idea of my developed, and developing, character into light. Who am I? What roles do I take part in? Have I acknowledged them all, weeded them all out of my conscious and subconscious?

I had been thinking about my theoretical approach to counselling for a long time now. The bug had been planted in my head during my undergraduate years while earning my Child and Youth Care degree. Back then, I had always admired my teachers who came from a Rogerian, or Humanistic place. It was all new to me back then, the definition of "Rogerian" not quite sorted out in my mind. What mattered to me most, and what I appreciated in helping relationships, was an acceptance, and a respectful and invitational way of being with another person. I went through the program believing that that was the way all helping professionals were—I had a very different opinion of Behaviourism then than I do now. Years later I see that there is no best way to practice, that it is simply a choice of how you want to practice. "And when I came to ask myself how I wanted Beowulf to sound in my version, I realized I wanted it to be speakable by one of those relatives" (Heaney, p. xxvii). And when I came to ask myself how I wanted to sound as a counsellor in my approach, I realized I wanted to embody my entire self. I wanted to define my developing character, acknowledge my beliefs, values, and fears so that I may be consistent with how I actually present to a client.

## *Relationship*

I turn the pages of my long poem, reading intently. Back to the first page, I read and re-read the italicized preface where I included my thoughts on Pablo Neruda in an attempt to take the major nuance of the poem and encapsulate it into a pre-poem set-up. I have never done anything like this before. I am not looking at what I can take out of my poem; for the first time in my life, I am looking at what I have already put in my poem, and checking, and re-checking to see if there is anything else I should say in order to do this poem justice. I stop for a moment and contemplate this new found respect. My poem has become more to me now than it ever has before. Looking at the words on paper, I imagine the reader taking them, and imagine how their discourse may accept, reject, or forgive them. I wonder if Pablo Neruda really did see what I saw in the artichoke, or if my vision overlooked his vision while I read his words. I dig around on the bookshelf, locate *Full Woman, Fleshy Apple, Hot Moon* by Neruda (translation by Stephen Mitchell, 1997), and flip quickly to the page of the artichoke. I read his words just as I had eight months ago. I rationalize in my head for a while, thinking about legal aspects, and how I don't believe I've violated any. In my poem's preface, I focus on the word relationship, the last word on that page. I read the full long poem again, and check to see if I have written clearly about relationship. I believe I have. Now I wonder if I have written about the right relationship— does it reflect the natural rhythm of a real relationship? What are the natural rhythms of a real relationship?

I remember my mentor, my fourth year poetry workshop instructor, poet and publisher, comment on my long poem a year or so ago. "Don't let this one go Sara. You are so close." We talked for over an hour, me struggling to pin point what changes needed to be



made, and what part was so close, and which part I could let go. He sat there patiently with me, leading off from where I left my thoughts and sudden revelations. When I got home, I wrote down every single point we had touched upon that afternoon. I go back to this list to centre myself before I tackle re-reading or editing a poem. I was reading this list the day I realized that I could apply most of this list to my counselling practice. This list could serve as a checklist both for a poem and a counselling relationship:

- i. Who is the artichoke?
- ii. Is there more than one?
- iii. Is it just “artichoke-ness”?
- iv. Voice must be clear, and consistent.
- v. Use Pablo Neruda’s poem as an epilogue, and play off it.
- vi. Rhyme must be consistent throughout entire poem.
- vii. Have poem continual, from page to page and visually connected. Indicate sections.
- viii. Lose the didactic voice, unless you want to give instructions on having a relationship.

Reading down the list I respond as if it were a checklist to reflect on my growth as a counsellor.

*Who is the artichoke?*

Who is the subject of this poem? At times I speak of an artichoke, though at times I speak as if I am the artichoke. It is a dual experience of knowing and understanding, using



my feelings to access a client's feelings, both mysterious and familiar. In a counselling relationship, I am aware sometimes that I feel unsure about when to self-disclose. "Very rarely," I hear my teacher say in the back of my mind, "use sparingly." Deep down I'm afraid of speaking like I'm the artichoke, like I'm the client, or that I've been triggered or obviously transferring my own experience onto the client. It feels like a battle sometimes, and I just want to connect, relate with this person.

*Is there more than one?*

Yes. Whatever transpires in this counselling relationship will go back to their family in some form or another. I am cautious to serve the client, not fix their family. Cautious of repeating any hurtful patterns, that I am aware of so far. I am aware of a slight numbing feeling inside as I consider the magnitude of a client. I can not know everything all at once. I have no guarantee of ever knowing exactly what it is that a client is looking for, or needs. Maybe it is not just one specific thing a client wants to find, maybe it is several things, and maybe the client can not identify these things. Maybe the client does not want to identify these things because it would create a change that could never be compatible with the way their family members are. There are so many possibilities, so many dynamics.

*Is it just "artichoke-ness"?*

Meaning, is it just bringing together a bunch of different ideas that stemmed from a general notion of an artichoke, or is it more substantial? I consider my responsibility as a

poet, as a communicator. What am I trying to convey? I begin to think of the reader first. What will they take from it? Will it contribute to their life in any useful and meaningful way?

*Voice must be clear and consistent.*

I recall all the journal entries I have written about voice, trying to make sense of it. I am more than the way I sound yet, my voice is representative of me, it is my character, my make-up. This is why I embrace Seamus Heaney's thoughts in his *Beowulf* introduction. It is as though everyone else can hear our voice before we can. Other people have our voice before we do. It is frustrating to think that our voice is unique, yet handed down. I wonder if my voice comes through to clients. Do I come across as genuine and unconditional because that is how I choose to be? My voice always seems to stay the same, although it feels different sometimes. Moods and emotions seem to pass through my voice, like dialects, coming from different times and places. I contemplate a voice being dependant on my ears— it's a good thing listening is the number one counselling skill. I make room for the clarity of voice, listen for its clearness. I wonder how my voice, and how a client's voice, react, respond and influence each other.

Keeping voice consistent brings to mind consistency of approach both theoretically and as a counsellor. In a poem consistency covers a wide range of elements such as voice, rhythm, rhyme, diction, and form. Counselling requires a consistent approach, attempting to create a framework to move around in and match a client's pace.

*Use Pablo Neruda's poem as an epilogue and play off it.*

I immediately think of using metaphor to work with a client. Just as Neruda's poem offered a summation or introduction to frame my poem, there must be something in the client's life that can act as a metaphor for what they hope to address. In many situations I remember clients giving examples of situations; metaphors waiting to be acknowledged. Much like the poem, I found it useful either to stay completely in that metaphor with a client, or refer back to it as a home-base, or way of centring or working back in towards the narrowing problem. Finding a sense of identity within Neruda's poem also helped me feel validated. Helping a client find a metaphor or an example either inside or outside their life could help them feel validated too, by taking what is there, accepting it, and utilizing it.

Another way of looking at this, is seeing my discovery of Neruda's poem as a part of the whole experience. Rather than keeping the discovery to myself, I acknowledge the impact it has on my poem. I see my poem differently, think of other ways people see an artichoke. There is a connection to Neruda simply because we both see beyond an artichoke. There is more to a client than what I may initially perceive. I wonder if I really do spend enough time seeing beyond a client, exploring how a client sees something, or if I act based on how I see it.

*Rhyme must be consistent throughout entire poem.*

When I hear a nursery rhyme, I think of children, it has a very distinct intention. I re-read the section of my poem where I experiment with rhyme. I consider how it may relay a

playful quality, or even change the meaning I intend to convey. This poem may not be the right place to experiment with rhyme. This counselling relationship may not be the appropriate place to try out a technique from a different theoretical approach. We have established a Rogerian type of rhythm, following the client's lead. A desire to explore his issue using art has been brought up by the client. I find myself changing as we proceed—I behave in a way that feels more clinical. The dynamics have changed, I wonder if the meaning of the counselling relationship has been changed. How will this affect him? Was our rhythm replaced by a rhyme? Throughout a counselling relationship, I've observed the importance of staying with the pace and plan originally set. I also learned that it is not always good to set a plan, unless as a counsellor you are willing to break it. I've narrowed it down to a plan being general, being sensitive and attentive to all of the issues identified. The pace considers a client's vulnerability and where they are at. Breaking a plan doesn't mean abandoning the whole ship, but instead changing its course.

*Have poem continual, from page to page, and visually connected. Indicate sections.*

Scanning my original long poem I start to feel the choppiness that the page breaks are causing. I have established sections in my poem by keeping shifts due to form, rhyme, rhythm, and voice each on their own page. It makes sense now as I read each page separately, how I read it continually without breaks when I first wrote it. I was reading it how I wanted it to be read, not how it was written. The sections I had identified were complete unto themselves, but without the context of the long poem they would not stand on their own. As I read through my poem now, I stumble. I have suddenly switched from a

binary form to prose. I feel horrible. I have been expecting the reader to follow along with my unannounced whim and decisions. How much of what I think am I communicating?

As a beginning counsellor I have struggled with feelings of being overwhelmed, identifying areas of concern with a client and trying to figure out what order they should be addressed in, and in what way. I want to be respectful of when and what the client wants to address, but it ends up feeling like we're going in circles. Now I see in my poem, I went back to those sections, and created continuation by not separating them on different pages. I remembered my poetry teacher telling me to think of association as sensual not sequential. I gave myself permission to come back to a topic as many times as naturally indicated by the rhythm and intent of the poem instead of trying to create a form to make the link obvious. I see how I can do this with a client, but I know it's going to take a while to become comfortable with that circling feeling, that maybe it isn't really a circle, but an indicator of narrowing in on an area.

As a poet, I am aware of how I am presenting what I expect the reader to absorb. As a counsellor, I incorporate my awareness and knowledge with a client's expectations and resources. It seems like there are two writers in a counselling relationship— not only are we co-writing a version of the present, sometimes re-writing the past to compose the future, but two minds are conjuring meaning, interpreting experience. The visual connection in a poem, considers the reader's unfamiliarity with what's coming, and acts as a guide. A visual connection, shared vision or goal between a counsellor and a client acknowledges what is happening, and what can happen in the future— like summarizing a session, and drafting out points for the next session. Can this minimize any surprises the client may experience, or even eliminate a fear of the unknown? How will the continuity in my poem affect the

reader? Will they feel more connected with the poem because they are not interrupted? If a client can see what direction they are heading in, will they feel more connected with the counselling process? Will feeling involved make them feel respected, and being respected allow them to respect themselves?

*Lose the didactic voice, unless you want to give directions on how to have a relationship.*

This one seems pretty obvious, the golden rule is not to give advice. I think most beginning counsellors, including myself, have adhered to this golden rule. What I noticed, is that as time goes on and becoming a counsellor is a little less new, a judgement of sorts is made. Psycho-education becomes advice, maybe because we believe we know what certain behaviours can lead to. What I think of when I read this checklist is that the client is on the receiving end of whatever I say. Sometimes, like during a psycho-educational piece, it is appropriate to give instructions, but be aware of those times. Right now I'm sounding didactic. At times I wonder if that is my natural voice. I see this didactic voice in my poetry, now I see how it is in my counselling too.

The artichoke list spurred my curiosity of transferable skills, and began many changes and development as a person. I began to see poems beyond myself, and realized that crafting a poem was creating a package of perspective and beliefs that I put out there for other people to read. I felt a strong sense of responsibility, a need to consider the timing and ramifications of my words. Suddenly, I wasn't writing poems to sort things out for myself anymore, rather I was writing to contribute to the larger dialogue of society. My writing had

meaning and was being given to people. I begin to see clients beyond what I know, and realize my beliefs and perspectives affect their discourse. I don't like to think of a client as a poem, or a package I put out there. I do think, that what I say, who I am, can affect their way of viewing and living in the world. I tell myself "counselling is beyond myself and my own family now; it is forgetting how I made my journey, and just being satisfied with the sheer experience of coming into contact with another person on their journey." But there is another secret thought that accompanies that one, "even though I am not responsible for the choices a client makes, I still feel responsible even though everyone tells me not to, because I am still viewed as responsible for whatever happens: sometimes by the client, sometimes by my supervisor, and sometimes by the public. That's a really scary paradox."

### *Rhythm*

It is still the New Year for me, and looking outside I am quite surprised, and kind of sad that it is not snowing outside. My bookshelves and desk are rearranged, so that I can look outside when I look up from my computer, to remind myself that there is another world out there. I continue scrolling up and down my latest poem-turned-short story, looking for changes I can make. Desperately trying to remember something, anything, from the correspondence short story writing course I took 10 years ago for fun, I try to figure out if there is enough beginning, middle, and end. Try to conclude if the rhythm is set out right, or if it is too choppy and didactic throughout the entire piece until I switch to a more lyrical tone for the long ending. The phone rings, it is my friend calling from Vancouver Island.



“What are you doing today?” she asks.

“Oh, did I tell you I am writing short stories now? Well, I’ve got one that I’m trying to sort out if it is even a short story— or something else that I just like reading out loud.”

“What was the name of that woman who sang about the sweater— well I always picture you doing something like that with music,” my friend asks.

“Like be a DJ? I’m sure my mother will be thrilled when I tell her I’m going on the road when I graduate instead of being a counsellor. Although, I am trying to incorporate my experience as a counsellor into my writing. And the music part too, even though I hardly ever sing anymore. It’s like I need to include the rhythm somehow, to include this part of who I am in this whole experience. Can I read out an excerpt for you?”

“Sure.”

I carefully read out a section of the story I had just worked on that morning, where I had consciously tried to write from my body instead of my head. I had purposely applied principles from Integrative Body Psychotherapy, such as breath, body, and boundary to my written work. In addition, the message from my poetry teacher in 1997, to “include the whole experience in a poem,” was at the front of my mind. I have been driven by that suggestion since then.

“It’s like a dream, do you know what I mean?” my friend asks.

“No, but ironically I do talk about dreams earlier in the story,” I add.

“It’s like a dream, that methodical kind of— you know it’s, soothing. Like, what do you call those, when you do meditations, those things you do when you talk and people lay back with their eyes shut, and you keep talking,” my friend explains.

“Virginia Satir positive affirmations read out loud, while people explore their



boundary and breath?" I ask, also thinking of the relaxation exercises using imagery.

"It's soothing, like breathing. It's— therapeutic, but not confrontational."

"So you liked it? It's funny you should mention it not being confrontational because when I first critiqued it I thought it was too didactic, too explanatory, so I went back to writing from my experience, from my body," I say eagerly.

"No, not at all. You know how in a story you read it and you identify with it on a deeper level. Well that's a good thing, and you can go at your own pace. I like to read about other peoples' experiences, then I don't feel alone," my friend says enthusiastically.

"That's great to hear you say because I wanted to create a piece where the reader would feel safe to identify with personal experiences, and not feel pushed, but more like you said— dreamlike, relaxed, like breathing."

"And to read about new ones that you might encounter in the future. That's always a bonus," my friend adds.

"Yeah, I wanted to incorporate a psycho-educational element, but not sound like I was giving advice. I just wanted to present a personal perspective of experience and offer a reassurance, I guess. Just show that this is a valid experience, and here's one way to think about it, one way to take from it and add to the bounty of your life. Hey do you mind if I keep you in mind for a character? I mean I use everything I come into contact with, and I use my own experience a lot. There's a lot of me in Clara, Poppy, and Kirby in that excerpt I just read, in fact I felt a bit weird about that," I say.

"Like you should have called it Sara, Sara, Sara!" she laughs.

"Yes!"

"No, I don't mind," she says.

I hang up the phone. I like what she said about breathing, and it feeling like a dream. I start thinking about how much my writing impacts my counselling, and my counselling impacts my writing— how there's a lot of me in Clara, Poppy, and Kirby. It's not so much about revealing different sides of my self, rather it's about understanding why and how those sides exist. If I haven't walked in someone else's shoes, like the popular belief of empathy suggests, then I'm going to open up to an experience and pull parts from any experience I have had to help deepen my understanding. This latest poem-turned-story is really affecting me. I approached writing differently with this one. I deliberately tried to stay in a certain frame of mind and body that allowed me to draw on all my experiences, and write from them instead of about them. I focused on my feelings instead of my thoughts. It feels like a trance, letting all my thoughts and experience turn into a giant heat that covers my skin where everything integrates— then only when I feel my ultimate trust that it will all come out— the whole experience— do I let the first finger drop onto the keyboard. This trust creates the rhythm that matches the character's development, because if it has existed in my experience, it will have its own heartbeat, own presence. I noticed as I read it again over the phone that the ending became more lyrical as the experience became more personal.

Re-reading, I see that I am trying to help people via the story. Then I realize that I have often tried to tell clients things by way of a story— sometimes to ease information to them, or to make a sensitive observation. Also, to avoid any conflict, but avoiding conflict potentially deprives a client of dealing with it in a safe, guided environment. I vow not to avoid conflict anymore.

A methodical rhythm was created, to bring the reader deeper into the story. Do I do that when I am counselling? Clients have told me that my tone and speed of voice is inviting

during relaxation techniques; but what about the rest of the time? Wouldn't this rhythm also include the exchanging of questions with a client? Why, if this is a relationship, am I not speaking up more about our way of exchanging? Suddenly, there is so much dependent on the rhythm of a relationship. I think back to what I've learned about breath, boundary, and relationship from my training in Integrative Body Psychotherapy. One of the main ideas is to be aware of your experience while being in relationship with another person. Acknowledge the characteristics of your breath and what is happening in your body, while observing your boundary, and the therapist's boundary. When I am with a client, it is essential to trust the process, and one way to get to the trust is to breathe. It is a connection of two spirits, of honouring your own spirit while honouring the other person's spirit. Staying connected with yourself, while staying connected with the other person. It is hard work, deep work, and involves a lot of risk taking. I take a deep breath, find solace in my belief that breath is always there—it is a tangible experience to explore right there with a client. I relax for a while.

### *Pattern of my Process*

I glance over at the clock radio— 2:23 am. I am barely able to move the mouse around, my fingers are so cramped. I have had an unbelievably fantastic internet search in the wee hours of this morning. Earlier this afternoon, I began sorting through my print-outs of poetry contests and submission calls. I went through them again and again, making note of which poems I would send where. As I scan the print-outs again and again, I begin

thinking “these are the same old journals, some of whom even admit they publish maybe 2% of the submissions they receive. There has to be more opportunities, more venues out there.” At first, I check the Canadian Journals I have already book-marked to see if they’re offering any contests. No luck, so I plug “poetry + contests” into the search bar. They’re all American magazines. I think “Why not? Other Canadian poets have crossed the border.” I print out the legitimate sounding ones for my duo-tang. Minutes later I stumble across a site where a girl’s biography lists over 30 publishing credits. “Wow,” I think, “she is really impressive, she must be well seasoned and probably hot in her career.” I write down her list of publications, and search for each one’s homepage. The first one I try doesn’t come up with anything. The next one doesn’t either. The third one comes up under an Insurance Agency’s site. “A mistake? No, it’s a corporate newsletter,” my mind trails off, thinking of the possibilities. I continue to check all the links at her site, and am overjoyed to find a listing of all Canadian writing contests. I had always wondered if there was one, sometimes thinking I might have to compile one myself. I begin to scroll through the long list. I book-mark a few, then realize this is an enormous task. I call it a night— my strength and ability to focus is shot.

The next morning, I continue reading through the Canadian contest list methodically, printing out ones that seem attainable, and book-marking ones I will come back to in later months. It was a two hour process, and the end result was a rather large stack. I review the haul, feeling excited like maybe an honourable mention could happen if I enter all the contests. I arrange the contests according to deadlines. Now I feel overwhelmed. My brain feels like it’s freezing over, and my knees are weak. I think “I don’t have enough poems,” and I know I have to stop. I have to take a break, take stock of what I actually have to send

out. I determine that I would rather decide what I feel confident about sending out, rather than just trying to send something to everybody.

The word confident jumps out at me, and I wonder if this experience I just had can help me with my counselling. I think about the panic I felt, and the excitement of finding so many new resources to tap into. It is a rhythm that I fall into, or rather a lack of rhythm. Last night, I sought out more opportunities, more venues, because I was frustrated with what I had become familiar with. So I opened up to new ideas, new opportunities— new resources. I felt like the world was my oyster when all those contests came up, but then was quickly overwhelmed. Is it about how I see opportunities? My panic turned into self-anaesthetised calm as I methodically reviewed and organized the new resources. What kind of safety, security, sense of control did I have while I was organizing those resources? Was I in control because I hadn't got to the point yet where I was trying to synthesize this new information with what I already knew? Is that why I became overwhelmed again, and figured what I already had wasn't enough? When I stopped, I went back to what I originally had— what I was familiar with— to decide what I felt confident enough about to send out.

I have detected a pattern in my process as a poet, and also as a counsellor, but I am also thrilled to see how I broke that pattern. My tendency is toward the familiar, and trying to milk it for everything it's worth, but I did leave familiarity to seek out new, unheard of resources. I had remained open to the unknown. Unfortunately I panicked and went back to the familiar, but now I see where I can push myself. Frustration is what started this process. Perhaps I can use that as a red flag to tell me when to start looking outside what I already know, in order to feel confident about the resources I use and give to a client. Perhaps, I can take stock of the counselling resources I already have, and practice synthesizing the new

resources I come across with them, and to synthesize my new understanding of these resources. What I found is that my awareness of counselling issues change and deepen at a fairly rapid and consistent rate as a beginning counsellor. This has rattled my confidence at times, because although I may have a knowledge of an issue, new beliefs or awareness are constantly incoming, and sometimes conflict at a deeper level, making it awkward to deliver smoothly to a client or at least believe that I'm not coming across eloquently. I think to myself, "one resource, one proverb, one book— one acknowledgement is what's needed and appreciated— I try to give too much. I make things bigger than they need to be."

### *Purpose*

I find the large binder full of old poems marked "worthy of revision," and pull it from the far, dark end of the closet. A quick assessment reminds me of the time I wrote these— 1995, and I can't believe how horrified I am with these poems. "Wow," I think "these are really bad. The poems I dug out from 1987-1990 are way better. It just goes to show how much I thought I was improving, yet in retrospect I see that I was just growing, but I needed that growth to reflect on so I could improve."

I put the poems down, and think back to the time I wrote both sets of poems: before 1990, and after 1995. Before 1990, I was a teenager: rebellious, angry, and sad. I recall how my poems are all straight images— concrete images, with a super strong sense of emotions coming through. There are also metaphors, which, I am sure back then I did not intend to portray in the way I read them now. In 1995, my life had taken a full turn, and I was no

longer a teen, but a young adult working “professionally” towards a profession in Child and Youth Care. My focus had gone from myself, to other people. I remember telling an academic advisor “I just want to help people.” The poems written at this time were more cryptic— almost inaccessible to readers. They were not images anymore, instead they were statements, and factual observations. It was like I was trying to build on my writing skill by offering more than a picture and emotions, to add context and meaning. Like I thought that image and feelings weren’t enough, that they had to be “important” somehow by giving more information; yet in the process I had lost what I’d gone in with originally. Have I been writing with a super intense determination to master a craft— but in doing so, left my heart and true experience behind?

Lately, while I’ve been writing I’ve been yearning to put my feelings down instead of stating facts. I’ve been desiring to “be” and share my whole experience in a relaxed and “real” way. Not trying to “create a masterpiece,” but just being honest and “depicting” or “showing” my hopes, dreams and experience instead of “telling.” I feel like I have stopped myself from turning into a focused robot trying to make my career happen, by remembering that I am a person as well as a professional. Part of the process I went through in becoming a counsellor, was leaving the rebellious teen wrought with emotions and childlike images behind, but synthesizing the awareness taken from that experience and seeing it as a resource instead of a weakness.

One week later I’m reading a book for future resource, “Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide,” by Kay Redfield Jamison (1999). I recall my practicum seminars, and classes, where everyone seemed so freaked out by suicide, even me. It was pretty much a consensus that the fear came from not knowing how to deal with it if someone presents it;



or how do we detect it— know when to do something, since it is so closely tied with depression which is something we can't diagnose as a counsellor, which can seem like a stigma when first approached with a client. What I found in the first few pages of the book, was a resonate curiosity with the whole idea of purpose. I just wanted to grab and reread everything I'd ever encountered about death, and life, and ultimate meaning. For me it was existential, with an appreciation of the physical realities of dying, and my need for education around the process of dying, respectful of so many different illnesses, family experiences, and the grieving process in the back of my mind.

What I realize is that I have established a deeper purpose for writing and counselling. Both writing poetry and counselling are more for me now than demonstrating skill or craft. I desire to communicate a deeper appreciation of the diversity of life experiences. There are lines now that I've drawn for myself regarding poetry— limitations. Finishing a poem with a satisfaction of creating a "perfect end product" is no longer a priority, and neither is "fixing" a client's problem. Recognizing the importance of something lived—its uniqueness, and representing it as it is experienced, or how it could be experienced is most important. I no longer wanted to sacrifice content or relationship for results.

A leap of faith was made to accept that skilful writing would occur. Growth had already occurred, at least enough to capture the whole experience, as opposed to focusing on interesting and seemingly connected, yet unnecessary parts. This leap of faith is a deepened awareness of my own trust, and in confidence, judgement, and decision making. I have begun to consider my purpose in counselling, and what I want to accomplish. I am happiest when a client begins asking their own questions, to me, this is the best road to self-regulation, and an appreciation of self. As a counsellor, my growth exploded when I began



asking questions, and I grew even more when I stopped expecting answers— from myself and others. The biggest relief comes from believing that if I can't answer a question right away, that I will eventually, and even if I don't, that I have grown just by asking. On some level I had equated professional with "all the answers." I realize with excitement and a bit of a lump in my stomach that while I had been writing "professionally," I had stopped writing "passionately," I had stopped writing for myself. My first poems were so full of emotion and image, and even metaphor. Now, I catch myself thinking "for a poet who lives a metaphor, I certainly don't do it on purpose with any great awareness." As a counsellor, there have been times when I have tried to answer people's questions for them and give them solutions, instead of looking harder for the metaphor in their lives, and appreciating that the process is the counselling.

### *Curiosity*

Coming back from a day at the seaside in Whitby, England, I manage to get the front seat, up top on the double-decker bus. Looking around at my uninterrupted view of the fieldscape, I see the large, green patches, and a bright yellow mustard field, divided by hedges in the distance. On the field edged right up to the roadside, it is not green or yellow; it is black, and moving like dark water. I put on my glasses and focus on the mass of crows swarming the field. "There must be hundreds of them," I say out loud to my father. As I watch, I remember that a large group of crows is called a murder. I think to myself, "there is a poem in that."

Later that night I sit, listening to the pigeons conglomerating around the neighbour's rock wall, in Kirkby. I have written many poems about birds over the last four years. I try to write a poem about the murder of crows, but I put my pen down. I realize that I am taking an idea, and trying to turn it into a poem. It feels unnatural somehow, to force a poem out of this observation. Isn't a poem in an observation? Isn't a poem an observation? I struggle for a while, trying to determine my discomfort. After a while I consider my whole experience of observation.

I have been looking, but I have assigned meaning to what I've seen. Sometimes, when writing, I have taken an observation, and turned it into something interesting and evocative. Now I feel my sub-conscience rattled. I feel shaken at the thought of taking something, and turning it into something else. I want to write about the crows, but I want to write about how they really are. How could I ever know how the crows are? I can guess at their perspective, but the details come from only what I've seen. I have observed things I have found beautiful before, but now I see them differently. I realize now that I want to see from inside, instead of how it interacts on the outside.

I think of counselling, and how I have watched clients interact with the outside world; with their physical surrounding, with me. I realize this is only one part of the existing reality. How can I ever really know who a client is? I am cultivating a different kind of curiosity towards clients. It is a curiosity that transcends the basic skills we have learned. It feels to me like how a deeper understanding of empathy should feel. A desire to know how a client feels; but knowing and appreciating that I never will truly know. Instead, it is an added piece to the feeling, it is opening up and being curious about all of the many elements that contribute to a feeling a client may have.

I realize I am curious now about what a client finds beautiful. It does not matter to me so much anymore if I can not define what they find beautiful, it only matters that they can, and that I ask, and that I want to hear it. This curiosity makes counselling relationships more comfortable for me. I am not trying to do specific things—I find that information gathering is much more fruitful when I am not trying to get specific questions answered. Instead, being interested and curious in all parts of a client's life leads to a dialogue which shares much more information, and this seems respectful.

### *Judgement, Assessment, and Letting Go*

I press on, reading through the long poem that I've been working on for the last two and a half years. Each time I pick up the poem, I find an odd word, or repeated sequence that I can justifiably remove. This time it is different. This time I read the poem with specific questions: "What is the purpose of this poem? What am I trying to convey to the reader?" Instead of letting myself be swept away by a rhythm I find appealing, or going off with the image presented, I keep asking if it is enough for the reader, if it will mean anything for the reader, and if it will make sense for the reader. Also, I wondered if there is a strong enough purpose for this poem, if it will meet an unvoiced need or curiosity of the reader.

I begin cutting sections out altogether, and even rearranging the order of lines. I think "this is major progress, for me to be able to 'change' a poem so radically, instead of putting it off to one side and never touching it again for fear of losing its sacredness." I read out words, and carefully commit to an intended meaning for them and by them. I assess whether

the meanings will be clear for a reader. I wonder if this is more like guessing, that to assess something you look for specific things, look to meet certain specified criteria. I say the meanings of the words out loud and then, having this priority in hand, am able to reword these meanings in a more accessible, direct way. I find myself becoming increasingly aware of a struggle to maintain an openness in this poem, and of a trust I have to conjure up inside myself to believe that the meaning and image will not be lost if I remain clear about the intent in the first place. I continue working through the poem— making decisions, judging what is necessary and will serve the purpose towards fulfilling the larger intention of the poem. My focus comes and goes, but the poem becomes clearer as I commit to the meaning and purpose. I catch myself struggling with an unintentionally developed, early-formed habit of writing ambiguously, so that a specific meaning was never offered, and my poems could have more meaning as determined by the reader. I make a conscious decision to stop being cryptic, and to own up to a meaning— to own up to a specific purpose, and follow through incorporating the whole experience into the poem.

What is the purpose of this counselling relationship? Much like my decision to be sure of what my poem will convey, I want to be sure of what information, what meaning I am putting out to a client. I am assessing what is needed, and whether these needs are being met. As a beginner I find this at times overwhelming and confusing. There are so many different types of assessments that can be done, depending on where you are working. Assessments done everywhere include safety and needs. I can't help but feeling that there is another type of assessment going on inside me— an ethical one— checking to make sure I am doing everything right and required by my workplace, my profession, and my own conscience, "Talk about juggling— can I keep everyone happy? Good thing I can be labelled

a ‘pleaser’ and get some help with that.” I had created a dialogue with myself to check in about meeting the reader’s needs. In a counselling relationship, I can ask immediately if the client’s needs and expectations are being met; but I can’t help feeling that I’m caught within a flexible grey area inside an inflexible assessment.

What I learned was that in the process of working towards an identified issue in a counselling relationship, it was usually impossible not to have other issues identified by the client with an interest to pursue that newly identified issue right away. I am still learning how to feel comfortable with my judgement on how much time to spend on a new issue before getting back to the larger issue. I have learned to “let go” of ideas, content, and related information within the body of the poem, by focusing on the main purpose. “Letting go” within a counselling relationship came with a lot of confusion and my own inner conflicts. For example, how can I “let go,” if I’ve already learned not to “hang on” to a plan? Just as I learned to maintain an openness and sense of trust while writing a poem, I am conscientiously conjuring up inside myself a belief that the meaning and original problem identified by the client will not be lost if I remain clear about the intent in the first place. I realize too, that part of my struggle is based on how I’m used to doing things automatically. With a poem, I can cut and paste, remove and replace, take back and reword— and this doesn’t seem too easy to do with an actual person. I see that I am trying to shed my image, and way of being that I’ve always known, by becoming a serious and accountable professional— to cut and paste my past with my profession— to just stop being one way, and instantly become another.

Something else happened too, by accident. Something I see now in retrospect. I had taught myself to judge myself. Judge in a way that involved too many boundaries, too many

limits. I placed some really high expectations on myself. I actually remember telling myself “Just do it. You’re expected to do this right now, so just do it.” The crazy part about this, is that I hadn’t been taught how to do that particular something in the first place. I was expecting myself to meet the actual or perceived demands of other people, on their terms. Sure, sometimes beginners learn best by just jumping in, but in the process of jumping, I learned to ignore my instinctive questions. I unknowingly began putting my voice off to the side. By expecting myself to meet unrealistic expectations on a regular basis, I denied my voice, buried it deeper and deeper. I realize that I can’t prevent someone from judging me, but I do have a choice whether I will take their judgement and turn it into my own judgement of myself. I tell myself, “Look for the kernel of truth in the judgement, since you’re so good at milking everything for what it is worth—but then leave it at that; you might just as easily have not heard it in the first place.”

### *Confidence and Feedback*

While cooking breakfast this morning, I wait for the water to come to a boil so I can drop the two eggs in. I reach for the bread when suddenly the thought “I can dish it out, but I can’t take it,” pops into my head. Let me just say that immediately preceding this thought, I remembered sitting in a bar with a friend in Vancouver going over some of his poetry. I had been slightly hesitant at first, because I imagined the worst case scenario of putting my friend off writing for good. I envisioned sharing my feedback cautiously, but being pushed to say more and more, and then having my original comment turned into an unmanageable

reciprocal analysis. I remembered how different I was while I was participating in poetry workshops during my undergraduate years. It was like I had reached this place of comfort within myself where I could present a poem with confidence, and accept my classmates' feedback eagerly. My defence, my artichoke armour, was down due to my current environment and life situation. How open am I now to discussion about my work? Come to think of it, do I even seek out feedback on my work? Yes, I do, but unfortunately not from a group workshop with fellow poets. How much do I put out into that larger dialogue that exists? I realize how much happier I was while growing in the presence of a community of poets. Have I fallen into a rhythm where I write, critique, then reassure my confidence?

How much is trust a part of my process of growing as a poet? I love reading work out loud to my friends, or anyone interested in listening; and I look forward to hearing their thoughts, because who better to hear it from than the reader themselves? After dropping the eggs in the pan, I feel guilty, because I'm annoyed by my sister's comment on a newspaper article. I wonder about my threshold for agitation. Am I avoiding conversation to avoid feeling agitated? What is my natural pattern for discussion about my work? I remember the place I was in during poetry workshops, and how I was in a place where I wanted to hear what people thought about my work, and even guessed ahead of time as to what they might say, and what suggestions they might make, in order to promote my growth. How do I hear feedback about my counselling? Do I hear it, really hear it, if it is about something I haven't thought about on my own yet?

Knowing that I thrive on feedback from my peers, I looked forward to the weekly practicum seminars with other beginning counsellors. My armour is down, and I feel safe. I believe that when I feel safe and confident, then a client will too (or at least have more of a



chance too). I begin to wonder about how I get feedback from my clients. “I just ask them,” I tell my peers. I ask “how is this for you, or any thoughts from last week?” I do not tell them however, how I feel so strange sometimes asking a client for feedback, and there have been times when I haven’t asked for feedback. Sometimes I feel afraid, or awkward—it is not like talking to a peer. This is not because I don’t want to hear feedback that may be negative, it is because I am afraid they will start to doubt my competency if I ask too many questions. How honest can I be, before the risk of sounding incompetent kicks in? How safe can a client feel commenting on my performance? Not very, I imagine.

How much is trust a part of my process of growing as a counsellor? Reading through my journal I am rattled when I read an entry about a time when I put my fears and doubts out on the table to someone I trusted. I wanted feedback, but ended up feeling judged, hearing the vulnerabilities I’d shared being sent back to me as weaknesses just short of sin. I wonder “Is this an urban counselling-student myth—or just part and parcel of learning to override beginner’s doubt with specific questions about your performance?” Whichever it is, it’s safer to formulate the questions on my own, instead of in the presence of the person I plan to ask— after I have reflected on my experience, and indulged my haunting “what if” scenarios and sinking feelings of horror.

Later on I find a passage in Rilke’s (1904) ninth letter that resonates with what I’ve been thinking about:

And your doubt can become a good quality if you train it. It must become knowing, it must become criticism. Ask it, whenever it wants to spoil something for you, why something is ugly, demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don’t give in, insist on



arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time, and the day will come when, instead of being a destroyer, it will become one of your best workers— perhaps the most intelligent of all the ones that are building your life.

(p.102)

I love to share my experience and awareness with my friends— I would help them regardless if I was a counsellor or not. Who better to hear feedback from than from someone I have connected with for the purpose of helping them? It is a trust I conjure up to treat my friends as I would a client— but I have yet to conjure up a trust to treat a client as I would a friend.

### *Saying Less, Showing More*

Reading through the latest version of my poem-turned-short story, I notice that my voice has changed considerably in the latest revisions. I struggle for a while with the first paragraph, even changing some sentences, consciously changing statements from verbal descriptions of feelings, into actions showing feelings. Flipping to the last paragraph, I re-read, especially proud of the changes. My writing has transformed from telling to showing, moved from statements about the characters, to deep awareness, subsequent actions, and a stronger sense of “being.” I have shown what is present, by showing what is absent. Later that night I decide to challenge myself at work the next day, “Tomorrow, I will say less to each student.” I go back through my prose piece, check if there are any more opportunities to “show” instead of “tell,” and wonder about the form of the piece.

The next day at work I remember my challenge. I speak less and work more immediately with each student, taking what they give me, and leaving questions unanswered by myself with hopes they will contemplate them later. I try to relax in my chair, and listen while they speak, try to get an idea of how they feel about being here. I panic at times, knowing how easily I can answer their questions, give them information. "There must be another way," I console myself, "what good is inundating them with all relevant information, if they don't absorb it, or they forget it. Maybe they need to digest some information now in order to be able to digest more information later." I cringe at the thought of feeling uncomfortable by not telling all I know upon initial questioning. I consider for a moment the old adage "what you don't know won't hurt you," and then I add "knowing too much, too fast, can hurt you."

Upon reflection of my writing process, I see how naturally narrative I am. Many of my old poems, and even some recent ones are very didactic, but still narrative. Then I remember saying to myself "today I want to speak less." I wonder if it would have helped to have had something specific to work on, instead of just "talking less." If knowing ahead how I would "show more" would have eased any panic or discomfort felt when I talked less. When I'm writing, I have a cognitive sequence that I go through to help me "show" instead of tell. For counselling, when I'm consciously trying to speak less, I do listen more, but without any specific strategies; and other stuff happens. Sometimes this other stuff depends on the person's personality. For example, if they are really quiet, and not responsive to open questions, or my silence, then I break down and talk. Something I've thought about trying in the future when the conversation dries, is to consider if the open questions can be changed. I was taught that the French poet Baudelaire creates anticipation with each line. I have felt

myself do that at times with a client— to be very selective of my timing when I offer an insight; to hold off on answering a question or information sharing until it seems they have sorted it for themselves, or demonstrate they are moving, quickly, in that direction.

If I were to capture the cognitive sequence I go through to stay in “showing” mode when I’m writing it would look like this: What am I trying to express? What does it look like? What can it look like? How does it look when the character does it? Is it from the heart? Does it come from their breath? Does it get the point across? I would like to try this thought sequence while I’m counselling. It seems deeper than that though— it goes down to a trust in myself, a trust of the counselling relationship’s process, a letting go of a need to control what’s happening.

### *Hanging on to Fleeting Feelings and Thoughts*

I fill in the tower of Babel with violet-red, the grass already green. I colour around the spaces my niece is moving her crayon around in. I am surprised to read the label as violet-red, because I thought it was just red. I keep colouring, think to myself “this is what colouring was like when I was a child. Instead of asking for a certain colour, I would just use what I had.” Looking at the page, it is more colourful than it would have been if I’d asked for a grey crayon to colour the tower; the red has been utilized, made to go darker or lighter to create differences. My niece runs off and plays with her fuzzy red chair; my sister sits down and starts to flick through the television channels. I am feeling weird about the crayons. She stops at a program about blind dates, and I am horrified at a young woman who

lets her blind date drop her off at her home. "I'd never let that happen," I say, "until I'd dated him for a month or so and I learned more about him." My sister agrees, commenting that she has learned to trust her gut instinct. My mind wanders back to the crayons— unable to shake that weird feeling. "I just have to go and write for a while," I say, and excuse myself from the living room, desperately hanging on to the feeling from the crayon.

At my computer, I fall into my writing state— my eyes shut, head down, ears plugged. Remembering the crayon, I fall back into a time when I chose to use whatever I had, and make the most of it. Could it be, that that's where my resourcefulness, and creativity came from? From a conscious choice not to ask? Why didn't I ask? Did I not know what other colour to pick? I had worked through a fantastic book at Christmastime: "The Assertiveness Workbook," by Randy J. Paterson, Ph.D. (2000). Was colouring a time when I was at my passive best? My niece seeks me out to colour with me; we have a good relationship. She does what she wants to do, she sets her own boundaries. How did she come about to be that way?

Reflecting on that simple experience of colouring with my niece seemed to highlight my way of being with another person. Not only do I work quietly alongside an individual, but I hold off on voicing my wants, or even formulating any idea of what I want, for fear of interrupting another person's experience. This idea also came to me last night, while I thought about the previous story called "Saying Less, Showing More." The line, "How naturally narrative I am," stuck in my head, replaying over and over. I felt guilty about talking so much, until I actually thought about how I really am with another person. It suddenly hit me, that I am a "doer," not a "talker." What attracted me to both Integrative Body Psychotherapy and a Rogerian approach in the first place was that they were the most

similar to how I actually am with a client: being myself while being with them, aware of their space, tuning in to their pace, and watching how they are in the world. I chose this approach over cognitive-therapy, or a predominantly talking-style counselling.

Remembering the crayon did not come from poetry, but it resonated deep inside me, stirring my own development and growth as a person, and in this particular way, growing as a counsellor richly deepened my growth as a poet. My own character grew in a multitude of ways, thus influencing some very intricate details of character development in poems and stories. For example, learning about assertiveness, considering how a passive person and an assertive person would relate in certain situations and with different dynamics of power, richly contributed to the development of specific characters in short stories and poems. Observing my interaction with clients, turned my knowledge of interpersonal skills into more intimate portrayals of characters and interactions. These influences also reciprocated, influencing my poetry, and in turn, my counselling.

### *Vastness and Solitude*

Today has been a day much like a dream— passing through me, present while I reconnect with thoughts I have had before, and while I encounter new thoughts. Rainer Maria Rilke (1903) *Letters to a Young Poet* is enjoyable to read, and I feel excited, hear myself say, “I am actually enjoying this. I can’t remember the last time I read anything I identified so strongly with, that sounds so similar to something I would have written. I guess there is stuff out there if I am lucky enough to find it.” I underline several sections lightly

with pencil. The “letters” have a journal-type feel to them, have a day-to-day quality that is more human than philosophical or spiritual. As I underline, I notice how calm I feel. Even though there are so many ideas presented before me, there is a peacefulness, even in the midst of a torrent of thoughts. The writing is rhythmic, and has an undertow which seems purely natural and brings me back again and again to solitude, vastness, and love.

When Rilke first speaks of solitude and aloneness I feel some panic; feel guilty at the thought of needing to be alone, especially when counselling involves relationships, and being with other people. Deep down I remember the trust that I reinvent, and reconnect with continually while I am in a helping relationship—the trust to move out of my solitude into the solitude and vastness of the client, and the vastness of the relationship. The vastness also strikes me as symbolic of the resources I look to in my Self for support and guidance. When I’m counselling I move from the big to the small, from the possibilities to the reasonable invitations extended to the client. Then move from the client’s resources, out into their vastness of possibilities. It feels like a rhythm—letting go, letting in. Vastness lets me think of the larger activities of life, the things beyond our control; a faith so to speak.

I do not withdraw at Rilke’s talk of God, as I have done in the past. I think back to times I have talked resources with clients, and when counsellors have talked resources with me—faith was not mentioned. A week ago I was developing a handout for use as a resource for students. I listed the counselling centre, nurse and other supports, but I noticed that I hadn’t included the campus clergy. I went back and included the chapel.

When I write, it’s as if I stop being who I am and go deep inside that person who I can not name or describe. I go into an almost trance-like state, my body simultaneously reaching for, and pulling in, every thought, feeling or experience I’ve ever had that remotely

relates to whatever I am writing about. Then sifting through, choosing the most significant impressions from the colourful mass as it flies at me all at once. It is a solitary experience, my eyes are shut, and my face turns in to rest on my shoulder as I type my stream of awareness; letting go, letting in. My mind is free and uncluttered, I have known since early this morning, or late last night that I am gearing up to write. I know that I will be going into this solitary state where all of my senses are turned off to the world, and I'm guided only by my heart and my breath. I take care of every anticipated need and interaction with my family so I can minimize or even eliminate any possible distraction. It is this planning, this control— although considerate, it is still control— that stands out from my writing process.

It is a powerful process, one that brings me to the level of form I want to have as a poet; brings words from me that are straight from my core, pure and unbridled. This makes for a good relationship with a poem; but what about with a person?

I feel some powerful connections while counselling— but not all the time. Growing as a poet has not taught me how to be with another person— or has it? I can be with clients in a way that I am happy with, but not all the time. Is it even reasonable to expect a powerful connection all the time with every client? Would it be different if I had a process as powerful as the one I have for writing? I think about this, think how I can capture the powerful connection I find in that solitary state, and use it in the presence of another person. It is as though a private world envelopes me to enable me to perform as a poet. How can I carry this world over to counselling, and let it envelope a client, when it is the client I want to develop their own world?

Love your solitude and try to sing out with the pain it causes you. For those who are near you are far away, you write, and this shows that the space around you is



beginning to grow vast. And if what is near you is far away, then your vastness is already among the stars and is very great; be happy about your growth, in which of course you can't take anyone with you, and be gentle with those who stay behind; be confident and calm in front of them and don't torment them with your doubts and don't frighten them with your faith or joy, which they wouldn't be able to comprehend. Seek out some simple and true feeling of what you have in common with them, which doesn't necessarily have to alter when you yourself change again and again; when you see them, love life in a form that is not your own and be indulgent toward those who are growing old, who are afraid of the aloneness that you trust. (Rilke, 1903, pp. 41-43)

The heat of embarrassment prickles my skin as I realize again that I am not the only one experiencing solitude. It is a place we all go to, to find our understanding, but we bring that back and share it with our counterparts and those we come in contact with: clients to counsellors, counsellors to their supervisors, a poet to a reader. These same words of Rilke that I find solace in could just as easily relieve a client. Six years ago, in my parents' living room: the woodstove raging, the dog barking, the television talking to my father, I had this same revelation. Then, it was in the context of me being the client of sorts. Now it is in the context of an experience that I can draw from to share with, or help understand, a client.

In the living room that day, it became clear that although awareness was filling in a lot of the blanks between me and my family, it was also creating great gaps in the momentarily smooth functioning of our relationship. When I first took that great leap putting what I'd learned about family dynamics, communication skills, and self-awareness into action with my own family, things were good. Mom acknowledged my feelings, and dad

stopped himself from losing his temper in the morning. We were three functioning human beings, considering our lives within the context of each other's lives. A rhythm of understanding, sometimes compromising, was established. At some point, there was a breakdown. I noticed that this new knowledge and awareness that pulled us together, was now pushing us apart. I kept growing, and suddenly found myself trying to go back into that place where they had stayed, so that we could still have a life together.

Working with a client, I remind myself that things which seem small to me, are really big for a client. That I have already learned these things, so my "ah-ha's" have already taken place, but can still pack a punch for someone being introduced to it for the first time.

Working with peers, and supervisors, there are many things introduced to me, and I get those excited epiphany moments where everything makes sense, yet there are no answers. It feels good to know they have the patience to wait for me as I absorb something which is so basic to them, but a vast new hope for me.

### *The Whole Experience*

It's the end of August, mid-day, as I watch my sister harvest what's left of her garden. This is a new environment for me: an isolated log house; satellite television, and living with a married sibling. The sun has vanished, I watch the dark clouds roll in and listen intently for the first crack of a thunderstorm. The movie credits roll before the hour, and a time filler comes on before the six o'clock news. I watch a nun stroll around a museum— pause in front of a painting depicting a scene with a lady in the woods. I frantically try to recall who

the artist is, then realize with excitement that this must be Sister Wendy, who my poetry teacher was always talking about in 1997. My sister is inside now, the rain coming down too heavy, the peas overflowing onto the table; I am consumed by the television.

“Ah yes!” I declare as she names the artist, but I immediately forget the artist’s name, because I am thinking about what the artist’s home life might have been like. “Sister Wendy is amazing,” I tell my sister, “she’s so cool because she doesn’t say whether a piece is good or not, or what it means; she talks about the artist, well, asks about the artist. She is curious what was going on for the artist at the time, what was important to him, what motivated him. She takes the life outside of the painting and pulls it all into one context, and is curious about it. She is so Child and Youth Care.” The filler ends, and I go to the internet to try to track down more Sister Wendy. I find a video: *Sister Wendy in Conversation with Bill Moyers*. I am hooked; rush to the phone to order from Mosquito Books. This has become an addictive habit lately, acquiring books as resources; an unquenchable desire to find out more about other poets, other cultures, and different types of relationships. A need to go beyond myself.

Reading through my poetry notes, I find repeated reminders to look up Sister Wendy. “The entire experience. Everything that came into the experience is recognized in some way,” I read out loud. I skim my newer poetry, and compare it with poems from a few years ago. There is more to my poems now, more than an image, feeling, or idea each presented separately. Now, my poems incorporate the image and feeling with the idea.

How can I incorporate the whole experience into counselling? There is so much, there are many lives involved: the client, family and friends, and me; and aren’t there things I should probably not reveal about my life? I understand that my experience is just a part of me now and I don’t have to consciously activate it for it to be influential. Does that mean

that the other things are influential too? Of course, that's why I reflect on my whole experience, to identify strengths and limitations— before a problem can happen.

I consider that I may have more control when I'm writing poetry. I can stop, assess what I'm putting down, and judge if it's the right thing to say. In counselling, it doesn't seem that easy when I'm actually doing it. A word can be erased after it's written. I am still thinking about this at 1:23 in the morning as I sit up, and turn on the television. "What's wrong with me, what was I thinking? It is actually better to be a counsellor and have the person right there to check things out with— that's much better than hiding away with a pencil and paper trying to figure out what people will be thinking after I write it."

I still struggle with the whole idea of power differential and control in a counselling relationship. Even though I do not want the power, and do everything within my power to work collaboratively, I still believe that a client gives me power whether I want it or not— whether they want to or not. I wonder if that has something to do with their choosing to be there; and if this has anything to do with what I've heard about referred clients being resistant.

### *Passion, Vocation, and God*

"Which came first? My passion, or my disbelief in God?" I continue on before my friend has a chance to answer, and secretly wish she does have an answer. "I find myself in this whole new place, have I done the right thing? Two weeks ago I began writing a poem and it turned into this stream of consciousness about how far my life has gone in the last

three years since graduation, and I couldn't even remember where I had headed out to in the first place because it had all happened so fast." I swallow, look around for a glass. "I am here, and I forget what I want. The good news is my poems are the best I've ever written, although I find myself wanting to write narrative dialogue and prose poems. I feel so unconstrained, unlike in the rest of my life."

"You feel constrained in the rest of your life?" my friend responds— she is a natural counsellor.

"I feel like I have to choose to be either a Child and Youth Care worker, or a counsellor. They seem so different, yet they are the same," I confess, with confusion. "Do you remember when I was little and used to write all those poems about my conversations with angels?"

"Yeah they were good, very visual."

"I feel like such a hypocrite now. I mean, God and angels are a package deal right?"

I trust my friend, whatever she says because she has never passed judgement on me, never given me a hard time when I've said I don't believe in God— and she's known me since we were both born: at the same hospital, two weeks and three days apart, our mothers living in the same village. She knows my story, even though I only mentioned it once: as a child I had prayed to God every night to take me away, or at least let my undesired, abusive circumstances stop, and when the sexual perpetration against me continued, I gave up on him.

"Have you read that Jean Vanier book yet?"

"Yes," I respond quickly, the book coming back to me in pictures.

"What did you think?"

"I loved it. I read it in an afternoon. I was propelled to read on, I couldn't stop—even though he said people don't need therapists as much as friends to walk with them. But I like the idea of walking with them, not just talking with them," I trail off.

"You're ok with him being associated with church? I told you he was the founder of L'arche communities, right?"

"Yeah, he's not God, he's Jean Vanier, and I'd like to learn more about the L'arche organization. He is such an open and sincere writer in his book, I bet his programs really help people, and I'd like to know more so I can pass it on as a resource to clients."

What I didn't tell her, was that I was scared. Scared I was letting God slip into my life. I first noticed it months after I had actually written it; my poems had been unconsciously exploring this new tendency, this cautious desire to ask myself if my beliefs were changing. I was afraid that all the strength I'd survived on before would vanish if I put my faith in someone other than myself. And then it hit me— wasn't that in fact what I was expecting a client to do?

"Could someone like me work in a L'arche community even though I'm not religious?"

"But you have passion, Sara," my friend continues, "people see that. You should look into it." We talk about our friend who works at the Catholic worker for a while.

"I guess I feel like I am missing something that I need in order to give," I tell my friend.

Inside I struggle, knowing that clients and readers are in charge of what they give themselves, but I also know that I am giving them something whether it's intentional or not. My words, and my voice, are just an offering, an invitation to aid their own individual



formulation of change, own understanding.

“Sometimes I wonder, just what is the point of this whole poetry thing anyway? I mean I put my heart, and I guess a bunch of expectations, into my poems— and for what? It’s supposed to give my life purpose, something to strive for. But I get tired of it sometimes. Tired because I work so hard, and so conscientiously, to present it accurately and honestly, but it still doesn’t mean anything to anyone. So, I console myself, and tell myself that it really only needs to matter to me anyhow, but there is a part of me that believes that it should matter to somebody else. I don’t think we’re here on this planet to live being content by only ourselves understanding ourselves. Why work so hard at grooming our hearts, and our honesty, and our courage to do this, if it doesn’t matter?”

“It does matter Sarse, because people see your passion, and that’s how they get inspired to do things for themselves,” my friend says.

“Like Sister Wendy, when she tells Bill Moyers ‘that’s what vocation is— the need to do something.’ She needs to live her life for God, she couldn’t imagine spending her life in any other way, from the time she was a little girl. I need to learn, and to share my learning with other people— to help people from my most honest and deepest understanding. That’s why I am in the helping profession, and why I love to write.”



## Chapter Three

### *Discussion*

This project is about using life-roles to gauge and encourage growth as a beginning counsellor, which is done by showing growth within the experience of each vignette. The experience as a beginning counsellor is shown, and the link between growing as a poet and growing as a counsellor is shared in, and as, each experience. Analysing the growth experiences is outside the intent of autoethnography, however the next paragraph acknowledges major themes, or rather, elements of growth which underlie my growth experiences as a beginning counsellor.

In each vignette, a specific element of growth is identified, however, they are intrinsically connected to each other; highlighting the circular nature of my growth process, and the links between life experiences. The vignettes are neither chronological or in any other order; they each hold many growth experiences which, like threads, simultaneously hold the separate sections together that together create the whole piece.

It seems I took my poetry teacher very literally that day, when he told us to incorporate the whole experience into our poems. The idea stayed with me, transcending my growth as a poet, to my growth in all of my life-roles. It became a banner to remind me, and a quality to achieve; embraced my unarticulated desire to accomplish synthesis, assimilate all that made me into a helpful person and a professional counsellor. My last year of my Child and Youth Care degree was a time when everything I had learned was coming together. All

the loose ends seemed to connect in the right places— a full circle. I had no idea that I would experience this learning circle again and again, with new issues, and the same issues from different perspectives, growing in every direction instead of simply forward. I am reminded of my intense discomfort while waiting for the loose ends to connect.

From the vignettes, I have identified larger themes which underlie my growth as a beginning counsellor, and as a poet, which now seem like simple qualities that are at once both inviting and intimidating. A feeling, which I imagine simulates swinging back and forth on a large pendulum, accompanies my growth process in both roles. It is a physical and cognitive process; verbal thoughts and actual movements. Like the vignettes, the experience is cyclical, with no beginning or end; but there is discomfort in the space between seeing beyond, and assimilation— a discomfort with synthesis.

The need to “go beyond” recurs in nearly all of the experiences, as does making things bigger, giving too much, control, and expectations. It is a deeper connection I am looking for now— a connection beyond familiarity, or commonalities shared; an understanding transcending recognition or acceptance. It is a relationship based on the rawness of roots individually found embodied in our persons; a struggle to see beyond similarities, but instead to see myself. It is learning to trust that everything will come into the experience, and that letting go of trying to put everything in, lets me into a deeper counselling relationship. There has been a shift from related, to relationship; communication, to communicating; control, to chaos; and reality, to truth.

Letting go, and letting in was also a part of the pendulum swing, appearing throughout most of the experiences. It echoed my experience of moving in and out of solitude to relationship; and a new appreciation of letting the client’s experience into my

experience, but also sometimes out of my understanding. It was a letting go of control by accepting that I will not always know how a client feels, or what to do. Although consulting with peers, supervisors, and accessing community and other resources is already a part of my practice as a beginning counsellor, a new way of viewing this larger system came into place. I do not see it as an optional resource, but as a way of survival.

Giving too much reincarnated itself as giving up. Remembering my poetry teacher telling me “don’t let this one go Sara,” triggered me to think if I’d consider letting counselling go— and I had thought of this a couple times when I was so freaked and stressed out that my body remained fatigued by physical symptoms of anxiety. I had felt chilly, and everything was bright like I was on a movie set, and not sleeping at night became normal. I got to thinking about my expectations of what I thought a counsellor should be; and I discovered my true expectations were larger than they should be. For example, a counsellor never makes a mistake, any mistake or, that as a counsellor, I had to know everything about everything because people would look to me for resources. I discovered many conflicting beliefs, like I will make mistakes because I am a human being, but I can’t make any mistakes as a counsellor. To make things worse, I would hear stories from other professionals about how they had made a mistake— some small, some not so small— but they did make them; and they went on with their lives, but sometimes they were judged by other professionals, and sometimes that one human error overshadowed their performance in their eyes and the eyes of others. I am still not sure whether I find this comforting, or disturbing, to know that counsellors make mistakes, and have conflicting beliefs.

A huge shift from control to chaos took place. I use the term chaos in a positive way, to reflect my willingness to take on and encourage, (by not avoiding or preventing), the

unexpected and the uncomfortable. I applied my belief that there is no ultimate truth, to my self image. I am able to find comfort in the chaos, in my decision to trust my own judgement, even in the face of opposition.

Perhaps the most powerful recurring theme for me is a sense of "passing through." Like the dialects that pass through me on a cellular level, I have come to realize that my understandings, decisions, expectations, beliefs and relationships will change, and the discomfort that accompanies promises only an inevitable experience that will lead to growth.

## Chapter Four

### *Conclusion and Recommendations*

#### *Conclusion*

The elements of growth shared in these thirteen vignettes may be considered skills, but I view them as qualities— growth and development that enhance and undermine skills— growth that may take more time than a course outline allows. Using an existing life-role as a template to draw from and measure against, can assist in a deeper understanding, and growth toward mastery— greater flexibility as a counsellor during counsellor training.

A move towards synthesis of personal and professional took place, and was stimulated by the reflection on another life-role. Seeking out similarities opened the door to observations that may otherwise have taken longer; and questions were developed about growing as a beginning counsellor. Fears were uncovered and accepted, and compassion let into professionalism.

The reflection process shared here: identifying elements of growth in other life-roles, and using the observations to gauge or promote growth as a counsellor, is useful for the following reasons. By identifying growth in another life-role, confusing times that happen while growing as a beginning counsellor are not debilitating. Instead recognizing that growth has been achieved before in a similar situation provides hope, inspiration, and a guide to growing as a counsellor.

Having this way of measuring and spurring growth awakens a sense of survival. This sense of survival contributes to the breaking of patterns, and the decision to push oneself in areas other than those that are familiar.

New realizations are reached, about the complexity of growth, and the length of time involved in the growth and learning process. During several growth experiences, issues that had been acknowledged before in life took on new appearances, and opened up opportunities for much deeper, and different explorations in personal counselling.

By identifying conflicting beliefs, relationships and expectations took on new meaning. Because some beliefs showed up repeatedly in my life-role as a poet, the desire to address it differently, in a way more suitable to the counselling profession prominently emerged. This personal experience brought home deeper, and deeper realizations that transcended the awareness raised earlier in different professional and personal roles. The voice of a beginning counsellor is now added to the literature and growth experiences shared. The following process is a way of reflecting on growth as a beginning counsellor for the purpose of gauging and promoting growth.

Remain open to any feelings or thoughts of similarity you detect in your experience and knowledge of counselling. Try to trace the similarity's origin— why is it important to you? How does it contribute to your role in life? Does this similarity symbolize your struggle or desire to grow in another area of your life? Another way to proceed, is to consider another growth experience in which you are currently involved. Maybe you are noticing a lot of awareness as you delve deeper into the world of fly-fishing, or as your interest in the history of cinema evolves. These other roles in our lives can contribute to growth and understanding in our professional roles and, for the purpose of this project,

specifically the role of a beginning counsellor.

The key is to bring the similarities into the specific context of counselling. Identifying the similarities is much like a translation into specific elements of growth. Although growth experience involves figuring out the subtle nature, dynamics, and perimeters of the elements of counselling, the basic areas of counselling are presented in counselling programs. Dig deep into feelings and hunches until you are able to put the similarity into words. This will help you find suitable terms for growth in both life-roles. Record these findings, even if it is just one or two words in your journal.

Take the term identified, and make as many connections to counselling as you can. This is much like a writing exercise found in Mayes (1994) *The Discovery of Poetry*. The object is to make as many associations to the word as you can, to create a deeper layered text with more possible meanings.

The final step is to move back and forth between the connections, articulating aspects of your Self, and implications for client and practice. This will provide a way of gauging and promoting your growth as a beginning counsellor.

### *Recommendations*

Recommendations are for future research to include more beginning counsellor's experiences. Future research could involve more autoethnographic experiences that focus on the growth experiences of beginning counsellors but which are not limited to one specific life-role. The lives of beginning counsellors could be presented more in the literature.



Experiences and revelations about growth experiences that contribute to the growth of a beginning counsellor could be explored. Are student counsellors utilizing thoughts that occur during a movie, challenging interactions, part-time jobs, family relations, travel, previous student experience, and surviving illness to help them make sense of their learning experience?

What are counselling students' thoughts on how they are evaluated, and prepared for entering the work force? Do students feel adequately prepared to monitor their own performance as a professional? Future research could consider these questions.

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